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Dear Editor:

I am writing today to discuss something which affects every citizen in our Michigan, our projected budget deficit. The state Senate has been and will continue to review where every penny is spent. We have looked at other deficits in Michigan's history to help us face the challenges of this budget deficit. We are facing some tough decisions as a legislature. However, contrary to what some are saying, Michigan's current budget shortfall is not the "worst budget crisis since WWII".

In 1981-82, the general fund deficit was at 21%. This is nearly twice as large as the 12% general fund deficit in 1990-91, and the current 2003-04 shortfall which is at 13%.

The recent cuts to the Michigan School Aid fund were very modest when compared to the 45 percent growth in education funding that occurred throughout the 1990's. This year's \$128 million shortfall in the School Aid Fund represents one percent of the total \$12.8 billion School Aid Fund budget. And next year's projected \$350 million deficit represent three percent of the total budget.

According to a recent statewide poll, 77% of Michigan's citizens prefer spending cuts and other belt-tightening measure over tax increases to balance the state budget.

The decisions on what to cut out of the state budget will not be easy. The cuts will be major and painful. However, Michigan can survive the cuts and the shortfalls without raising taxes. We have done it before. We will do it in this budget year and with this budget. Michigan citizens have stated strongly that they want government to focus on the key departmental missions. Our focus will be moving Michigan forward to restore our economy, provide a strong business climate, a highly educated workforce and a high quality of life for all of our citizens.

Patricia Birkholz, State Senator
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